

What Guides the Division?

Guiding Philosophy and Values:

The Division of Wildlife Conservation recognizes wildlife as a public trust belonging to all Alaskans. We respect the diversity of public values associated with wildlife, and support uses that reflect sound conservation principles and public desires. We are an organization of individuals committed to interacting professionally with one another and the public, and to using scientific data and public input to conserve Alaska's wildlife.

Vision:

Excellence in wildlife conservation and public service.

Mission:

Conserve and enhance Alaska's wildlife and habitats and provide for a wide range of public uses and benefits.

Goals:

- Expand and improve services, opportunities, and outreach to all wildlife users.
- Maintain and enhance our high level of wildlife research and management expertise.
- Improve internal effectiveness and efficiency.
- Promote public participation in decision-making.
- Develop methods to accommodate dual management of our wildlife resources and work for resumption of state management.



Photo courtesy of John Hechtel

Existing Programs

Wildlife Management And Research

Wildlife management involves a wide variety of biological and administrative activities. Management biologists, primarily working out of area offices, collect information on wildlife population sizes, trends, productivity, and levels of mortality from hunting and natural causes. They also serve as a point of contact with the public on wildlife management issues, assess public interests and needs, sell hunting and trapping licenses, issue harvest tags and permits, make public presentations, deal with nuisance and injured wildlife, provide information and recommendations to supervisors, and perform other essential duties. Management biologists compile and analyze biological information and present it to the Board of Game so it can establish population-based and ecologically sound hunting and trapping regulations.

The division supports a staff of wildlife research biologists in order to collect information related to specific ecological questions or concerns. This information enables us to more effectively and responsibly manage and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats. Research projects cover a wide range of objectives, from collecting site-specific data for management decisions to understanding complex ecological relationships. Research efforts are generally developed and applied with the goal of maintaining or improving our ability to manage Alaska's wildlife resources.

Big Game

The division expends most of its human and financial resources on big game management and research. Since most of the division's revenue has been derived from the sale of Alaska hunting licenses and tags to big game hunters, this has been an appropriate emphasis. Moose, caribou, deer, and brown bears are the big game species that receive the most public use, and they have received the most management and research attention.

We conduct wildlife surveys annually. For the larger moose and caribou populations, specific population estimates are conducted roughly every three years using the latest scientific techniques. Dall sheep, mountain goats, elk, bison, and muskoxen are periodically surveyed to measure population status, trends, and productivity. Black and brown bear populations are difficult to estimate because they often live in heavily vegetated areas in the summer and den during winter. For bears, we obtain population information from intensive research projects in selected



Photo courtesy of John Trent

areas, and we are developing methods to extrapolate this information to larger areas.

We conduct research to:

- Develop techniques to better understand and estimate the status and trends of wildlife populations,
- Improve our understanding of wildlife-habitat relationships,
- Improve our understanding of predator-prey relationships,
- Improve our understanding of the impacts of human activities on wildlife populations, and
- Assess wildlife user attitudes and preferences.



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Small Game

Hunting, observing, and photographing small game, such as ptarmigan, grouse, and snowshoe hares, is a popular activity for many Alaskans, as well as an increasing number of nonresidents. Populations of most species of small game fluctuate between low and high levels. The division monitors general population levels through trend counts in key areas, incidental observations during surveys for other species, and by talking with hunters, trappers, and other outdoors enthusiasts. We have a program to improve ruffed grouse habitat in Interior and Southcentral Alaska by manipulating aspen stands, and have transplanted ruffed grouse from Interior to Southcentral Alaska.

Furbearers

Nineteen species of furbearers are trapped in Alaska, with trapping effort partly a function of pelt value in the fur trade. We use aerial sampling techniques to estimate population levels of wolverines, wolves, foxes, and lynx in selected areas, which we extrapolate to other areas with similar habitats. Harvest information is collected from fur export and acquisition records, and fur sealing reports for those species for which the law requires “sealing” by department staff or other designated persons. An annual survey is distributed to about 1,500 trappers to provide additional insight about the relative abundance and trends of Alaska’s furbearers. Presently, we have a few research projects focused on furbearers, including one to develop better techniques for estimating population size and trends of wolves, coyotes, foxes, and wolver-

ines, and another to improve our understanding of marten habitat associations and population dynamics associated with forest management.

Waterfowl

Although primary jurisdiction for the management of migratory game birds lies with the federal government (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), the division has a strong interest in the management of these important species and participates in management activities as permitted by federal regulations. Alaska’s wetland habitats and the multitude of ducks, geese, cranes, snipe, and other birds produced on them are of critical importance to the state and other parts of the world. Migratory birds provide food, recreation, and economic benefits to Alaskans as well as to people in other states and countries.

Our Waterfowl Program collects information on important waterfowl populations; monitors important migratory game bird issues, including habitat development proposals; and participates in the migratory game bird hunting regulation process through the Pacific Flyway Study Committee/Council and other agencies and organizations involved in setting migratory game bird hunting regulations. The Waterfowl Program provides technical staff to the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, which is the body responsible for developing spring subsistence regulation proposals under an amendment to the Migratory Bird Treaty.



Photo courtesy of R. H. Day

A greater white-fronted goose stands quietly by the water.



ADF&G Steller Sea Lion Project

Biologists capture a Steller sea lion pup to collect data and mark it before releasing it back into the wild.

Marine Mammals

The federal government assumed management of marine mammals in Alaska in 1972 with passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service are now the lead marine mammal management agencies. However, the division maintains a strong presence in marine mammal conservation because of the great importance of these species to Alaska. The majority of funding for the division's marine mammal research efforts comes from federal sources obtained through grants submitted by marine mammal staff.

Our marine mammal program conducts numerous long-term, nationally and internationally recognized research projects that supplement and compliment those undertaken by federal agencies. The results of these projects have substantially increased our knowledge of the biology and ecology of Alaska's marine mammals, which has subsequently:

- improved the understanding of how marine mammals interact with commercial fisheries,
- provided important information to Alaska Natives for their subsistence use of marine mammals,
- been integrated with wildlife viewing programs

that provide the public with opportunities to view and photograph marine mammals, and

- provided a credible, objective source of information for organizations concerned about the impacts of various human activities on marine mammals.

Wildlife Habitat

Diverse, productive habitat is a prerequisite for healthy wildlife populations. Historically, periodic burning by wildland fires has been the main influence responsible for maintaining quality habitat for wildlife in many parts of the state. However, settlement and development by humans creates an increased need for fire protection, which ultimately reduces the land's ability to sustain diverse, productive wildlife populations, at the same time that human demand for wildlife is increasing. Since the department, for the most part, is not a land manager, the division works with other natural resource managers and agencies to implement appropriate fire ecology programs. We also work with other agencies and private organizations to implement programs designed to restore or enhance habitat conditions for wildlife, and conduct research to evaluate the efficacy of various habitat management techniques.

Other Programs and Services

This section describes other programs and services provided by the division, and includes Hunter Information and Training; State Wildlife Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, and Sanctuaries; Information Management; Regulatory Process; Wildlife Planning; and Public Service.

Hunter Information and Training

Our Hunter Information and Training program is responsible for providing education and information to hunters to increase hunter safety and knowledge, and decrease the wounding loss of game. The program is divided into two main efforts; classes and clinics. A formal system of hunter education classes qualifies successful students to hunt in areas where hunter education certification is required. This certification is generally valid in other states where hunter education is a prerequisite to hunt. Additionally, there are specialized hunter education courses, taught by volunteers, for archery and muzzle-loading firearms that make hunters eligible to participate in hunts restricted to these types of equipment. The second area of emphasis is a system of hunter clinics presented on a variety of subjects. Clinics increase hunter knowledge, effectiveness, and satisfaction while reducing conflicts among user groups. Efforts to extend hunter education and Hunter Information and Training services statewide are ongoing.

The division operates two shooting ranges, the Rabbit Creek Rifle Range in Anchorage and an indoor range in Fairbanks. These shooting ranges provide training for hunter education classes and a place for the public to enjoy shooting.

State Wildlife Refuges, Critical Habitat Areas and Sanctuaries

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages 32 state wildlife refuges, critical habitat areas, and wildlife sanctuaries, known as special areas, for the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use of the areas. Although the Department of Natural Resources retains land ownership of refuges along with other state lands, as well as the ultimate land management authority, our department manages these special areas to provide high-quality habitat for fish and wildlife populations. With a few exceptions, hunting, fishing, trapping, and other recreational activities are encouraged, so long as they are in keeping with the statutory intent for establishing each special area.

Notable special areas overseen by the division include:

- Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary,
- McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge,
- Anchorage Coastal State Wildlife Refuge,
- Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge,
- Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge,
- Stan Price State Wildlife Sanctuary (Pack Creek), and
- Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area (Wolverine Creek).

Several of these areas are world famous, and provide opportunities to view birds, bears, walrus, and other species of wildlife.



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Information Management

Our Information Management program provides centralized data processing, and statistical and computer programming support services to the division's wildlife management and research programs. It is the clearinghouse and central repository for big game and furbearer harvest information. This program administers and conducts the lottery for all Drawing Permit Hunts in Alaska, and administers the Tier II Subsistence Permit Hunt scoring and allocation system for the department. The program also supports the regulatory process by serving as a liaison between the activities of the Alaska Board of Game, the division, and the public, and has the central role in supporting and communicating regulatory process activities within the division. Information Management also provides GIS-based data analyses and digital mapping capabilities to the division.

Regulatory Process

Public participation is an integral part of Alaska's fish and game regulatory process. Any citizen or group may submit proposals for changes to Alaska's hunting and trapping regulations to the Alaska Board of Game. The board considers and votes on each proposal. In addition, more than 80 publicly elected Advisory Committees around the state review and comment to the Board of Game on regulatory

proposals, and generate their own proposals as well. The composition of the Board of Game is further evidence of the public nature of the process. Each of the seven board members is appointed by the governor and must be confirmed by the legislature. Finally, at each of the board's meetings, every member of the public who wishes to testify is given an opportunity to speak.

The division functions independently of the board and does not oversee nor control the regulatory process. The board is responsible for, among other things, establishing hunting and trapping seasons, setting harvest limits, and allocating wildlife harvests among users. The division's role is to provide the board with biological information, offer suggested regulatory changes based on available information, and provide analyses and recommendations on proposed changes offered by public organizations or individuals. Within the department, the Boards Support Section is responsible for overseeing and supporting the state's regulatory process, including its Fish and Game Advisory Committees.

Wildlife Planning

We are increasing our efforts to involve the public in wildlife management decision-making in response to growing public interest in becoming involved, and the increasing social complexity of wildlife management issues. Public involvement methods range from simply seeking public input on division proposals, to collaborative processes with a high level of public participation.

Collaborative planning includes a broad range of shared decision-making arrangements authorized by law. Collaborative processes have been increasingly used in wildlife management planning. Some examples of management plans drafted with considerable participation from stakeholder planning teams include those for brown bears in GMU 4, the Kenai Peninsula, and Kodiak Island; for the Fortymile and Western Arctic caribou herds; for moose in the Koyukuk Rivers and Yukon Flats areas; and the Anchorage Bowl Living with Wildlife Plan. These teams, and others around the state, have developed management plans that ensure the conservation of species, while providing for the diversity of public needs, desires, and values.



Photo courtesy of Shane Moore

A curious young brown bear investigates a can of bear spray. Keep the spray with you, ready to use, if necessary.



Photo courtesy of Alaska Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Program

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman clinics teach outdoor skills of all types to participants, focusing on shooting/hunting, fishing, and other outdoor skills, including survival, camping, canoeing and bear safety.

Public Service

Public service is an important part of the division's mission and function. Regional and area personnel regularly respond to questions and requests for information on a variety of topics, from wildlife hunting and trapping regulations, to hunting and viewing opportunities, to general wildlife questions and nuisance wildlife complaints. Our staff also "seal" the hides of hunter- and trapper-harvested bears and furbearers, and provide hunting licenses at many offices, along with big game harvest tags and permits.

Existing Programs to be Expanded

The division has had programs in wildlife education, nongame management, and wildlife viewing for several years, but they have been small due to limited funding sources. New federal funding provided through the state's Wildlife Grants Program, offers the opportunity to expand our emphasis in these three important areas.

School and Community Education

Educational opportunities are among the most frequently requested services we provide to the public. Education is an integral component of effective wildlife management and people tend to appreciate and value wildlife more when they understand it better. Educating the public about wildlife generally increases their involvement in conservation, and also helps improve compliance with wildlife laws and regulations. Our current programs in community education include outdoors skills clinics, such as Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, public presentations, and education and interpretive programs on state wildlife refuges.

Programs within the school system include Project WILD, a program geared to K-12 teachers and their students, and the Alaska Wildlife Curriculum, consisting of Alaska-based information that complements the national Project WILD curriculum.



Photo courtesy of Dick Shideler

Viewing and photography is a use of wildlife that is growing in popularity and economic importance in Alaska. McNeil River State Game Sanctuary offers an opportunity to safely view bears at much closer distances than normal, as shown in this photo, because of the strictly controlled viewing environment.

Nongame Management and Research

More than 80% of Alaska's 275 regularly occurring species of birds are nongame, as are more than half of Alaska's 90 mammal species.

Nongame can serve as indicators of the health of systems, and they provide natural functions like seed dispersal, nutrient cycling, and pollination. They also serve as prey for many game species. The division has participated in national bird conservation programs such as Partners In Flight and the Alaska Shorebird Conservation Plan. Existing national conservation plans for waterfowl, landbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds will provide us with an excellent framework for developing new division programs. Currently, our nongame projects are limited to a few raptor surveys and cooperative work with other organizations to gain an understanding of the distribution of neotropical migratory birds.

Wildlife Viewing

Opportunities to view wildlife in their natural habitats are important to both residents and visitors

of Alaska. Many Alaskans and most visitors want to watch wildlife, and many travel specifically to view wildlife in Alaska, resulting in substantial in-state expenditures each year. Wildlife viewing is cited as the second most important reason that tourists come to Alaska.

Currently, the division's limited wildlife viewing resources are concentrated within a few of the department's state refuges and sanctuaries. Refuges adjacent to urban areas, such as Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks, the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, and the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge in Juneau, are popular birding locations for locals and visitors, and also offer some interpretive programs or displays. World-renowned brown bear viewing opportunities are provided at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Stan Price State Wildlife Sanctuary at Pack Creek. The Alaska Wildlife Viewing Guide, written by department staff, is a widely available book, and excerpts are posted on our web site, along with information about visiting the sanctuaries.